
CLEANERS AND POP CULTURE REPRESENTATION

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It is no longer credible to claim that building cleaners/janitors are invisible in popular culture today.¹ Increasingly, we find them in film, videos, novels, and even television sitcoms and commercials.² The manner of their representations, however, is an altogether different thing. It is this I seek to examine and discuss in this paper. The assumption too that cleaners are invisible in society, is also no longer tenable. This is largely due to the militancy of cleaners themselves in cities like Los Angeles, where they have mounted campaigns to disrupt the normalcy of corporate office operations (*Bread and Roses*, 2001; Waldinger et al., 1998) and protested their evaporating labour rights, employer abuse, and the latter's reluctance to recognize cleaners' unions (Aguiar, 2004; Waldinger et al., 1998). In the United States, the Service Employees International Union (SEIU) has been instrumental in asserting this visibility through its Justice for Janitors (J4J) campaigns (Waldinger et al., 1998). These have been deployed across the United States, often grabbing news headlines by the staging of festivals of resistance (Klein, 2002) for better working conditions, respect and liveable city spaces (Milkman, 2000; Waldinger et al., 1998).

My intention in this paper is to analyze cleaners' presence in pop culture, including films and music videos. Three discourses predominate in representing this economic activity and the people who perform it. One, the occupation of cleaner is foregrounded and used as a vehicle for a narrative of the protagonist's self-actualization and class ascension. In this version, the cleaner is less important than the occupation he (almost never a she) holds. Two, cleaners are constructed as disenfranchised and degraded with little or no respect and value in a status driven society. Here, cleaners are purposely debased, allowing a "marginalized" group to state a point about its position within post-fordist regimes. I have categorized such a representation as an "aestheticized" image of cleaners. Neither of these discourses is concerned with depicting the reality of cleaning as work, or the working experiences and stressful changes cleaners are encountering. In other words, there is little concern for the experiences of cleaners and the lives they lead in the midst of tumultuous change. A third

discourse, in contrast, focuses on the cleaner and his/her workplace thereby providing a closer reading of the work itself. Though this is a more generous and rewarding representation of cleaners, it is flawed.

THE GLOBAL CITY AND CLEANERS⁴

Over a decade ago, Saskia Sassen (1991) argued that the global city rose as the command and control structure of a global economy linked to, and run from select geographical locations. These cities by-passed national states in arranging, coordinating, and enacting the economic engines of late capitalism. Capital, and finance capital in particular, moved via the infrastructures of the global city (e.g., global transport and communications) rather than through the national state-mediated processes and regulations of the fordist era (Cohen, 1997: 166-167). In this scenario, Sassen argued, finance capital has virtual *carte blanche* in conducting its operations by determining the rules and regulations regarding investment, disinvestment, market determinism, and the fiscal burdens of the welfare state. But the global city is not simply an economic behemoth. As well, it is a series of landscapes and social identities for the consumption and entertainment of the new *petite bourgeoisie* occupying the “new economy” of the global city (Cohen, 1997: 167-168). Global migration has been crucial in enabling the “new economy” of the global city in the North by recruiting high-skilled workers for the high-tech industries and “invisible workers” for the high-tech building surfaces of the new workplace (Cohen, 1997; Sassen, 1991). The South, in contrast, has experienced a new and enhanced round of brain drain, and structural adjustments for the benefit of the global bourgeoisie (Bello, 2002; Sklair, 2003; Starr, 2001).

Sassen makes two additional points that merit mention since they connect the global city and the janitorial industry. First, she states that the janitorial industry was the fastest growing occupation in the United States in the 1990s and that it is projected to continue to grow well into the first decade of the 21st century. This impressive rise is a result of the tremendous boom in the industrial construction industry in the United States, where offices, malls, supermarkets, retail stores, hospitals, educational and sporting facilities are being built across cities and towns in the United States at an astonishing pace. Cleaners are in high demand not only to clean the debris after buildings had been constructed, but also to clean offices, washrooms, hallways, atriums, gyms and other locations once the buildings’ tenants have moved in. The corporate turn to privatization, deregulation, and contracting out – the result of neoliberal policies of various “post-fordist” nation-states – has dramatically transformed the nature of the janitorial industry. This transformation, however, has come at great cost to those employed in the industry. Janitors are now exposed to, and made increasingly vulnerable by, the contracting out of janitorial services. This has led to

deteriorating working conditions, declining wages and job insecurity and a post-industrial citizenship in labour relations terms (Macdonald, 1997). At the same time, an expanding reserve army of potential janitorial labour has emerged as a result of growing unemployment, state workfare programs, and soaring documented and undocumented migration (Aguiar, 2000).

Sassen's second point is that cleaning services are not part of a cohort of dying industries in post-fordist capitalism, nor have they outlasted their usefulness. Instead, she argues that cleaning services are an integral part of the maintenance and functioning of the new types of workplaces found in global cities. In fact, without a cleaned office or hospital room, other work activities are unlikely to take place (Cohen, 2001). Sassen's contribution is significant not only in developing the idea of the global city, but also in stressing the importance of "invisible work" in the economy of the global city.

Despite Sassen's insights into the cleaning industry, her work does not develop an ethnography of the groups of "invisible" workers who facilitate the functioning of the global city. (Sassen, 1991). These workers, and many others, are often displaced and devalued in corporate capital's inscriptions of the culture of the city, and in designations on who belongs and who doesn't in the global city (Sassen, 1999: 110-111). Corporate inscriptions overvalorize the "corporate center" while simultaneously devalorizing what is "outside the center, which comes to be read as marginal" (Sassen, 1999: 113-114). Typically, this happens to "marginal" workers who are also often migrants. The latter comprise the large majority of workers in the building cleaning industry distributed along a gender division whereby women perform 'light duty' work and men 'heavy duty' work (Erickson et al., 2004). But if we displace capital's reading of the changing city and come to recognize that immigration, for example, is a process "whereby global elements are *localized*, international labour markets are constituted, and cultures from all over the world are de-and reterritorialized puts them right there at the center along with the internationalization of capital as a fundamental aspect of globalization" (emphasis in the original; Sassen, 1999:111). It remains that capital "concentrates immense power" in the city by deploying control (and investment) strategies for super profits. But "marginality" assumes a political presence in the center as well: "notwithstanding anaemic economic and political power, [marginality] has become an increasingly strong presence through the new politics of culture and identity" (Sassen, 1999: 114).

Clearly, one of Sassen's chief achievements has been the undermining of the discourse of "invisible work" as marginal to the global city, or as a remnant of an older, by-gone era of city economy. For her, it is crucial that social researchers make invisible work visible and refuse to rely on capital to define essential and non-essential work in the global city. It is the double presence of cleaners – their increasing presence in the city and their support of an elite lifestyle, as well as their militancy in the city for better working conditions – that

has placed cleaners in the center. Pop culture, as a result, could no longer ignore cleaners as either subjects in themselves (rarely) or as stand-ins for the purpose of articulating (frequently) others' agenda. Whereas in the late 1980s I could argue that cleaners were essentially invisible in pop culture, today this argument is no longer sustainable.⁵ For example in a number of films released over the last decade, cleaners have played prominent roles. While cleaners are still "invisible" in these films, their presence is more varied. Further, the image of the cleaner and his/her occupation is evoked and transmitted through various vehicles of pop culture. This "aestheticized" image of the cleaner is constructed, communicated, and contingent on the intentions of the filmmaker. By "aestheticized" I mean a stylistic, superficial and fetishized representation with little or no connection to cleaners' lives and experiences. The impact of restructuring on cleaners and their social and workspaces in the global city, is rarely embedded in cultural constructions of cleaners.

I am not arguing that false representations of cleaners have been circulated in films and videos. To argue this would undermine much of the excellent work done in cultural studies in exposing social and political issues. Rather, in this paper, I seek merely to point out that several representations of cleaners have been constructed, and that the discourses have often placed cleaners outside their own workplaces and experiences. Thus, an image of cleaners has been created, and circulated but tells us very little about how to conceptualize and understand cleaners' life and world. An aestheticized image of cleaners is repeatedly substituted for the real conditions of cleaners' work.

JANITORS AND AMERICANISM

A predominant pop cultural representation of cleaners ignores their position in the class structure, focusing instead on a larger, more significant discourse. The latter entails a mythology of class ascension, self-invention, and an unwillingness to be burdened by an unwanted identity (Browder, 2000). This discourse is evident in the scores of cultural forms, including films. In her discussion of ethnic impersonator autobiographies, Browder (2000) writes that "narratives stand as monuments to the tradition of American self-invention as well as testaments to the porousness of ethnic identity" (Browder, 2000: 3). It is in this vein that I argue that constructions of cleaners have little to do with cleaners themselves since their screen presence serves merely to identify positionality in a narrative deployed for the more grandiose discourse of Americanism. That is, cleaners' social scripts are neither of their own making nor for their purpose. Indeed, cleaners and their occupation are vehicles for a larger canvas of class ascension and self-actualization free of class conflict and the hidden advantages of whiteness (Lipsitz, 1998) and cultural capital. This aestheticized image is evident in a selection of pop cultural productions discussed next.

In the film *Good Will Hunting* (1997), the protagonist starts out as a cleaner at MIT. He cleans hallways, corridors and classrooms. But his “occupation” is only a strategic backdrop to showcase “Will’s” real ability, an ability to decipher complicated mathematical formulas. The latter are left on the chalkboards in the classrooms he cleans. It appears that the sole purpose of showing Will cleaning classrooms is to bring the audience to bear witness on the real intentions of the narrative: to demonstrate his mathematical prowess, and at the same time, infer a disjuncture between his intellect, white skin, and the occupation he holds. Before long, the film implies that cleaning work must be temporary for Will. It is a temporary holding station for him and his much more ambitious and self-actualized objectives. His inevitable class climb will ensue once someone instructs Will on how to control his temper and discipline his working class incivility. Clearly, cleaning is no job for a white boy with an attitude but who is obviously intelligent and talented. The longer Will remains a cleaner, the greater the risk of routinization (Leidner, 1993) and the deadening of his ambition. In the midst of a declining fordist paradigm where “angry young working class white men” are supposedly marginalized and discriminated in North America (Winant, 1997), *Good Will Hunting* restores hope and optimism of a white working class in the midst of rapidly changing economic and cultural terms (Davis, 2000: Waldinger and Lichter, 2003). Predictably, the film ends with Will getting the girl and rerouting himself into a self-fashioning path for success.

Another example of this theme occurs when cleaning work is invoked to remind us of the ideology of class ascension by “grounding” it and providing examples of those who have already partaken successfully in this climb. But this ascension is never expressed in terms of a broad class movement; it is always framed in a biographical discourse of the self-fashioning of the individual. Autobiographies are “evidence” of how “one individual [takes] the raw material of his or her life and [forms] it into something shapely, unique, and successful” (Browder, 2000: 3). In the United States, this fashioning is largely ignorant of key factors such as social and cultural capital. When jazz great Sonny Rollins’s name is invoked in pop culture, for example, it is usually done to draw attention to his music. But occasionally, and in the same breath, listeners are reminded of his previous work as a janitor. There is no vehicle for a discussion of how Rollins’s music was positively influenced by his experiences of janitorial work. Instead, this nostalgic biographical bit is presented as a re-affirmation of the classic melodrama of starting at the bottom and persevering to reach the top. In the rhetoric of social mobility and opportunity, we are repeatedly told that being a cleaner/janitor is no barrier to class mobility and self-realization – even for a black man.

JANITORS AND REHABILITATING WHITENESS⁶

In popular discourse janitors are constructed as passive, degraded, disenfranchised, humble, and invisible to society. They are marginal and invisible in their own social spaces. Having aestheticized this image widely, cultural producers and self-positioned marginal groups invoke a sense of “shared” characteristics and “experiences” with cleaners. In this strategic positioning, the cleaner is both used to identify marginality and at the same time rehabilitate whiteness. That is, the imaginary cleaner is stressed, articulated and positioned immediately to identify the issues of concern, and appropriate them as a project in self-actualization. Some groups identify with the cleaner as they showcase their own anxieties, disillusionment and displacement in the changing social structure. They appropriate the role of the cleaner as marginal and without societal respect in order to depict their own sense of dislocation and alienation in contemporary society. In this context, the cleaner is designated as the prototypical subject of neglect, abuse, and marginality. This is a practice of whiteness, in that, while it seems to be inclusive, is in fact re-articulating privilege by incorporating those on the margins in its (white) terms and for its (white) purpose. In her new book, *Black Sexual Politics*, Patricia Hill Collins (2004) argues that blacks are no longer invisible on film. Rather, their presence is very much incorporated into the development and resolution of the movies’ plots. But the incorporation of Blacks in the stories rarely speaks to their own experiences and points of view. Instead, their “characters” are developed and positioned in the main story only in so far as they can assist, support and rehabilitate the principal white character in films (Collins, 2004). In other words, whiteness positions Blacks to have a presence only in so far as their screen time is for the purpose of the white narrative and its conclusion.

It is commonly believed that the most significant song of the “Grunge”, “Generation X”, movement of the late 1980s and early 1990s was Nirvana’s “Smells Like Teen Spirit”.⁷ In the video to this song, the band is filmed playing at a school auditorium to a bleacher full of teens. At first the teenagers are fixed to their seats. But as the band moves further into the song and becomes “possessed” by the lyrics, the teens begin to move and suddenly become rowdy and crazed by the tempo of the music and Kurt Cobain’s movements. While this is going on, there are frequent isolated shots of an aging white janitor holding his mop and bucket, also in the auditorium and also moving to the song. Clearly, the male janitor is neither with the band nor part of the intended audience of the video. Why, one might ask, is he in the video at all? Janitors in school grounds often act as gatekeepers to the premises and frequently police kids/students in school buildings, especially after dark. This, I think, would disqualify the janitor from screen time. But the camera does not simply shoot the janitor to place the band in the auditorium - where one is likely to find a janitor after hours. Instead,

the frequent shots of the janitor and his presence suggest much more. I propose that the janitor in the video stands in for the displacement and lack of respect that Generation Xers feel in society. The video appropriates the popular image of the cleaner to create an association with Grunge's anthem – "Smells Like Teen Spirit". Nirvana's video isn't so much arguing for teen's inclusion in the mainstream, but rather to stress that teens are marginalized, devalued and ostracized from mainstream society. These are all characteristics ascribed to cleaners/janitors.

A similar example of the referent of the imaginary cleaner is in the work of performance artist Mike Kelley. He has been dubbed a "grunge" artist who "rubs viewers noses in the dirt – literally and figuratively" (Hume, 1994). "Trash, junk, excrement – literal and figurative – are the staples of [his] creations" (Hume, 1994). According to one critic, "[h]is drawings, especially, are so mired in excrement they almost stink" (Hume, 1994). In one of his most notable prints, Kelley draws a horse peeing and being surrounded by it (Hume, 1994). In another piece from his mid-1990s collection, Kelley creates a self-portrait in the image of a janitor. In this portrait, the janitor (Kelley) stands tall in uniform with a nametag and resting his hands on the end of the mop, which is upright between his legs. In the pose, Kelley, is also looking right and into the distance. The significance of the portrait and the demeanour of the pose suggest the meniality of janitorial work. For an artist who finds meaning in drawings of "trash, junk and excrement", this portrait of a janitor, who cleans waste, excrement, and much more, may not be unexpected. But there is another discourse in the pose. It seems to imply a "look/interpretation" of the world from the vantage point of the janitor, or if you like, the powerless, neglected and abused workers in society. While I recognize and acknowledge the attempt to give credence to the point of view of the janitor, it is, nevertheless, still a gaze framing the cleaner as lowly and pitiful in the social structure. Further, the "janitor" is inactive (though one could argue that he is active through his eyes) and voiceless. These constructions fit more the "image" of the cleaner used to fulfill the point of view of the producer of the image, rather than reflect a more complex view of cleaners and their experiences and actions in a post-fordist regime of accumulation (Aguiar, 2004; Milkman and Wong, 2000; Waldinger et al., 1998). There remains an unwillingness to construct cleaners as made up of complex identities and as agents in their lives.

In the film *Bruce Almighty* (2003), the lead character plays a "soft news" television reporter who seeks the appointment of the news anchorperson. When Bruce doesn't get the anchor's job, he becomes depressed and angry feeling that he was again passed over for his dream job. He begins to question his career, his life, and in the process alienates his girlfriend. His protest is mostly shot while he walks outdoors screaming about how he has been overlooked in God's master plan. Bruce is quite dejected. In the next scene, Bruce is surprised to find himself

in an empty office floor only with an old man mopping the floor. The audience finds out quickly that this is no ordinary janitor; it is god posing as a cleaner. Portraying god as a janitor implies the humbleness of the "almighty". But it also suggests that it is "he" who cleans up all the mess and makes it right; he returns everything to its rightful place. Without going into the details of the film, "god" imposes on Bruce the status of the "almighty" and asks him to do better. When everything seems to be crumbling around him, Bruce Almighty returns to the empty building to ask "god" to relieve him of his power. God agrees but insists that Bruce mop with him. As they mop together, god turns to Bruce and says, "be your own miracle". In other words, pull yourself up by your own bootstraps and make something of your life. This neoliberal god makes it clear that complaining will get you nowhere and that he helps only those who help themselves.

In some cases the imaginary of the cleaner is more clearly articulated with a racial discourse. In the following example, the whiteness⁸ of the "cleaner" allows a movie character to move and assume any identity he wishes. In the popular 1993 movie, *The Fugitive*, the main character, "Richard Kimble" assumes the role of a cleaner in order to infiltrate his former workplace to gain evidence that will prove he is innocent in the murder of his wife. The scene is brief but critical to the plot of the movie. Having been convicted of murdering his wife, and after escaping police custody and a scheduled execution, Richard Kimble returns to the hospital where he practiced medicine to uncover clues that will convince the police of his innocence. Because the police are after him, he cannot return to his former workplace as Dr. Kimble. As a result, he impersonates a Latino ("black") cleaner. In so doing, the film reproduces inaccurate representations of cleaners. Dr. Kimble's janitor is anonymous, invisible but consequential for the doctor since he wants to move about the hospital incognito. The invisibility is even more accentuated if we keep in mind that Kimble is a convicted murderer, and that both the Chicago police and the FBI are looking for him. Therefore, it is clear that the identity of cleaner is essential for Kimble because no one would even think a doctor would assume the identity of a cleaner, and being a cleaner would give him clearance to go anywhere in the hospital. Social scientists write that cleaners often express job autonomy as an important feature of the work they perform (Hood, 1988; Messing, Haentjens and Doniol-Shaw, 1992). But such a portrayal raises questions about cleaners' invisibility and the purpose of this role in the film. The janitor is depicted as a loner in the workplace without friends or colleagues. The film denies the cleaner any real social relations at work. And why should it? Cleaners, like other workers, create their own subculture in the workplace (Hood, 1988). But to suggest a web of relationships for cleaners would have invalidated Dr. Kimble's identity as a cleaner. Furthermore, the "cleaner" assumes a role only so as Dr. Kimble can use him to exonerate himself. He, the cleaner, does not exist

otherwise. It is the arrogance of whiteness – the belief that as a white male one can transcend “race” – that leads Dr. Kimble to assume the identity of the cleaner – the “other”. Such a practice of whiteness is very common in literature, pop culture and folklore (Browder, 2000). The reverse, the “other” assuming a white identity, is rarely imagined.

JANITORS AND THEIR NEOLIBERAL WORKPLACE

The third discourse on cleaners and their representations in pop culture is gentler in its treatment of the subject, as we will see. The neoliberal workplace is characterized by deregulation, income insecurity, poor labour relations and precarious employment conditions. It is also a workplace that is increasingly occupied by visible minorities corresponding to the re-organization of labour markets, the globalization of the economy, and the forced movement of millions of people. Moreover, the neoliberal workplace is one that is increasingly monitored, surveilled, and punitive of workers in the labour process (McDowell, 1997).

Two recent representations of cleaners in pop culture, in my view, are more illustrative about the work of cleaning than those described above. These examples allow us to get closer to the cleaner and what he/she endures in the workplace. In these cases, there is no attempt to use the cleaner to fashion another discourse, or to comment on one’s own position and status in society. Instead, these representations bring us inside the cleaners’ world and invite us to observe what that means for them.

The first case is a music video by the Canadian singer/songwriter Mathew Good. In the Mathew Good Band’s early hit “Apparitions”, the music video takes place in an office tower “after hours”. The video begins with a young woman going up to a corporate office to “service” an executive. While she is performing her “job”, the janitor witnesses a yuppie snorting coke in a washroom. Later the same janitor plays a fake pistol-shooting showdown with a security guard in one of the hallways. While this is going on, the young lady runs out of the office and the janitor discovers that the executive has collapsed from an apparent heart attack. These types of “services” are not unique to this video montage. However, the video does present a particular vantage point on and about the cleaner. Two significant points may be made from this video. One, the “deviant” behaviour of corporate players is clear once we get behind the brick walls in which they work and “play”. This behaviour is witnessed by the silent cleaner who moves in and out of corridors and offices in the office towers. In this case, Mathew Good seems to be undermining the discourse of the overvalored corporate executive and his yuppie clone.

Second, the numerous security cameras demonstrate the constant policing of cleaners in the workplace. Throughout the video, the cleaner is

watching different scenarios develop, but at the same time, the surveillance cameras follow him wherever he happens to be in the building. No doubt this surveillance weighs heavily on the cleaner. In addition, the idea that cleaners have access to an entire building, and may move about anonymously, as *The Fugitive* implies, is not accurate. While a cleaner may enter most areas within a building, he/she does so under tight security and is recorded by the surveillance system. This monitoring has little to do with protecting cleaners in the workplace, and much to do with ensuring the integrity of private property and space, as well as decreasing costs by observing ways cleaners may intensify their work pace.

Globalization has transformed the city culturally, spatially and symbolically (Sassen 1991; Koptiuch, 1991; Sawhney, 2002). This transformation has been contested. It is undertaken reluctantly as a result of the forced urbanization and migration of people who have little option but to leave their homes due to wars, economic depravity, structural adjustments, and reorganizations of the global division of labour. The extent of the changes in the city in the West has led some to argue that we are witnessing the "Third-Worlding at Home" (Koptiuch, 1991; Sawhney, 2002). By this concept, Koptiuch (1991: 88) means that the third world is no longer be spatially separated from the first. This includes the "exploitative incorporation and hegemonic domination – and its fierce contestation by subjugated peoples – that used to take place at a safe, reassuring distance." Some films have accentuated this presence, though interpreters have not always read it in this manner (Sawhney, 2002). A recent example of third worlding at home is *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002).

The setting for *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) is London, England and the underground economy⁹ in which many migrants find themselves as a result of racism, their undocumented status and the deregulation of the economy. As a part of this underground, cleaning is depicted in this film. The premise of the story is an illegal operation of organ-selling (human kidneys) in a hotel in London. "Okwe" is the central character in the film. He is a Nigerian undocumented immigrant working and living in London's underground. When we first meet him, he is examining the genitalia of a number of black males, presumably, for a sexually transmitted disease. The implication is that Okwe has some medical knowledge or training. By the end of the film, the audience realizes that he is a Nigerian doctor denied the practice of his profession in London by his undocumented status. In the film Okwe travels through London's underground economy by the work he performs – a night desk hotel clerk, a taxi driver and a cleaner – and by providing the audience with evidence of what that world is like, what relations govern it and who works in the underworld of contemporary capitalism. The most significant person Okwe meets is "Senay." She too is a migrant from Turkey, and like him cannot legally work in London's economy. Yet, she labours as a hotel housekeeper until a raid by immigration

officials leads her to abandon cleaning and move into a garment sweatshop. Here, her employer forces her to perform fellatio in exchange for her job and his acquiescence regarding her status in the factory. Her employer too is a visible minority. By following Okwe's movements in the underground economy, the audience sees the decay, exploitation and misuse of human bodies in an economic paradigm mad with competition, exploitation and greed.

The film depicts a pretty grim picture of what it means to be a migrant in the global city. We witness the abuses migrants endure and the survival strategies they invent in order to patch a paycheck together. But the narrative exculpates whiteness and the state by focusing the abuse on the exploitation of one visible minority against one another. The deregulation of state legislation and its lack of attention to the specific needs of new migrants are not part of the film. It is implied that such deregulation has resulted in haphazard rules imposed by unscrupulous employers on their workers. Still, the film is unsatisfying, particularly in how Okwe (male) is constructed as an agent of his experiences in London, whereas Senay (female) is not. Further, the film is constantly preoccupied with pegging her escape to Okwe's movements. Okwe is educated, dresses smartly and seems to have a plan for abandoning this nightmarish underworld. In contrast, Senay is sexually abused and on the verge of selling her kidney in order to escape the underground and London. Her agency is strictly tied to her body parts (mouth and kidney) but Okwe's is not. The re-enforcement of patriarchal relations is disappointing in the way the film constructs the story between the two principal characters. Still, *Dirty Pretty Things* (2002) reveals the workings of the underground economy in London. Cleaning work is very much part of that underground, and sometimes acts as a "sanctuary" for migrants without documents who stay in the city and must support themselves. This lack of official documents exacerbates an already vulnerable presence in the industry. In this film, undocumented workers pay a very high price for the "sanctuary" of the underground cleaning industry. And it is precisely this fictitious "sanctuary" that creates the environment for their continuous super-exploitation and abuse.

CONCLUSION

In past practices in film, TV sitcoms or television commercials, cleaners were briefly shot cleaning floors in hallways to establish the setting – an office, business or hospital. Cleaners usually do not speak and often their presence is shaded in a blurred silhouette form. I have argued in this paper, that the pop cultural representation of cleaners has recently been included in more complex ways. I have also suggested that this is, in part, due to the changing city and the increasing role that cleaners are playing in the economy. Though this has not been a comprehensive review of cleaners' representation in pop culture, these

observations provide an indication of the main themes constructing audiences' impressions of cleaners and their workplace experiences. More time and research would not necessarily reveal other discourses, I believe, but would provide me with an opportunity to demonstrate the shape and nuances by which the three discourses identified in this paper work in the representation of cleaners. Such a task remains to be done, and must be accompanied by an examination of how global capital continues to impinge upon many aspects of workers' lives.

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NOTES

- ¹ In an earlier unpublished paper (see note 5 below), I argued that cleaners were invisible in pop culture. That is, they were both lacking a presence in pop culture (e.g. films), and effaced when potted in screen time.
- ² By cleaners/janitors, I mean persons cleaning office buildings, malls, supermarkets, sporting arenas, hospitals, schools and the like. I exclude from this term paid domestic cleaners since there is a rich literature on this group of workers (cf. Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2000; Ehrenreich, 2001). The same, however, cannot be said for building cleaners.
- ⁴ This section borrows liberally from Aguiar and Herod (forthcoming, 2006).
- ⁵ While research for my dissertation, an examination of the pop culture and the representation of cleaners was undertaken. This was subsequently left out of the final version as a result of time and space (Aguiar, 1999).
- ⁶ According to Rasmussen et al (2001), there are five main components of Whiteness. They are: Whiteness is (1) invisible and unmarked. In this view, whiteness is so much part of common sense that it seems natural, normal and thus invisible. As a result, "whiteness operates as the unmarked norm against which other identities are marked and racialized, the seemingly un-raced center of a racialized world" (Rasmussen et al., 2001: 10). (2) Whiteness is culturally vacuous, empty and boring. "Whiteness is then best understood as a lack of cultural distinctiveness and authenticity, one that leads to attempts by whites to fill in the blanks through acts of cultural appropriation or what bell hooks has called 'eating the other'" (Rasmussen et al., 2001: 10-11). (3) Whiteness is structural privilege. Here whiteness means greater result of the colour of skin (McIntosh, 2001; Rasmussen et al., 2001: 11). (4) Whiteness is violence and terror. Whiteness in this definition is a power that is "an ever-present and overbearing source of dread for people of color" (Rasmussen, et al, 2001: 12). The most obvious example of this is white supremacists attacks on people of colour and blacks in particular. (5) Whiteness is the institutionalization of European Colonialism. Writers have argued that our ideas of race and racial superiority/inferiority are rooted in and the product of the experiences of colonialism and imperialism. The ideas of race were brought to the "New World" by the colonialism (Rasmussen, 2001: 13) and have had a remarkable resiliency in our society.
- ⁷ http://www.salon.com/ent/masterpiece/2002/04/15/teen_spirit/index2.html
- ⁸ In this discussion, I hold the definition of whiteness as "invisible" and un-marked as particularly relevant for how "Richard Kimble" moves about his former place of work.

⁹ The trailer for this film is available, online, at:
http://www.apple.com/trailers/miramax/dirty_pretty_things.html